DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 111 014 95 CS 202 233

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TITLE An Examination of the Instructional Concepts Program for Potential Interference from Black English Dialect.
INSTITUTION Southwest Regional Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, Los Alamitos, Calif.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
REPORT NO SWRL-TN-2-71-05
PUB DATE 71
NOTE 6p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS *Basic Vocabulary; *Interference (Language Learning); Kindergarten; *Negro Dialects; Primary Grades; *Program Evaluation; Reading Programs; *Vocabulary Development
IDENTIFIERS Black English; *Instructional Concepts Program

ABSTRACT

The Instructional Concepts Program of the Southwest Regional Laboratory (SWRL) is designed to help kindergarten children learn the labels of concepts which are important to success in school. Since vocabulary differences are characteristic of dialect differences, it is possible that some items taught in the Instructional Concepts Program are harder to learn for speakers of Black English than for speakers of other dialects and that these items can be related to known dialect differences. To test for this possibility, the items and subtests from the 1969-70 tryouts exhibiting the greatest number of errors were examined for the schools believed to consist mainly of black children. No such interference was found. (MKM)

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DATE: June 9, 1971

NO: TN-2-71-05

AN EXAMINATION OF THE INSTRUCTIONAL CONCEPTS PROGRAM FOR POTENTIAL INTERFERENCE FROM BLACK ENGLISH DIALECT

Stanley E. Legum

ABSTRACT

Response data for the 1969-1970 Instructional Concepts Inventory were reviewed for possible instances of Black English dialect features interfering with performance on the test. No such instances were found.

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AN EXAMINATION OF THE INSTRUCTIONAL CONCEPTS PROGRAM FOR POTENTIAL INTERFERENCE FROM BLACK ENGLISH DIALECT

The Instructional Concepts Program is designed to help kindergarten children learn the labels of concepts which are important to success in school. Since vocabulary differences are characteristic of dialect differences it is possible that some items taught in the Instructional Concepts Program are harder to learn for speakers of Black English than for speakers of other dialects and that these items can be related to known dialect differences. To test for this possibility the items and subtest from the 1969-1970 tryouts exhibiting the greatest number of errors were examined for the schools believed to consist mainly of Black children.

The Instructional Concepts Inventory was given in three school districts: San Diego, East Los Angeles, and the Jordan District. Most of the children tested in these districts were from low-income, racial-minority families. The Jordan District was heavily weighted with Black children,[1] the East Los Angeles schools were heavily weighted with Mexican-American children, and the San Diego schools contained a more balanced mixture of all races. For this reason the Jordan students were taken as most closely representative of Black English speech.

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[1]Of the 131 students in the Jordan District sample, only eight have Spanish surnames.

Three items on the 35 item posttest were answered correctly by fewer than 70 students of the 131 tested in the Jordan District.[2] These were:

Item Number	Correct Responses of 131 Subjects	Percent Correct Responses	Item
7	56	43%	Point to the curved line.
16	66	50%	Point to the monkey at the beginning of the line.
33	69	53%	See this cat? Point to to a cat over here that is a different size.

In each case the student was shown a flash card and had to choose one of three possible pictures as his response. It was necessary for the child to know the underlined words in order to make the correct response. There is no reason to believe that any of these five words--curved, line, beginning, different, size--are particularly difficult for speakers of Black English to learn. Indeed, two of them--line and different--were recorded in the casual conversations of kindergarten children from the same general area and socioeconomic background as those taking the test.[3]

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[2]The item with the next fewest correct responses was item 13 with 77 correct responses (59% correct responses).

[3]For a detailed description of the speech of the children who were recorded see Legum, Pfaff, Tinnie, and Nicholas, "The Speech of Young Black Children in Los Angeles." Technical Report No. 33, 1971, Southwest Regional Laboratory, Inglewood, California. The data for this report were collected in 1969, the same year as the beginning of the Instructional Concepts Program tryout.

The test consisted of seven subtests. It was noted that the three subtests on which the Jordan students scored lowest on the posttest were the same subtest receiving lowest scores on the pretest. These were the subtests dealing with Shape, Position, and Conjunctive Concepts. There is no reason to believe that any of these areas can be related to dialect differences in light of our current knowledge about Black English and Anglo English. A similar pattern holds for the other school districts. These three subtests are the lowest on the pretest for both the San Diego and the East Los Angeles children. They account for the three lowest posttest scores in the San Diego district and for two of the three lowest posttest scores in the East Los Angeles schools.

A list was compiled of the key words in each question. This list was then broken into two parts based on whether or not the children studied by Legum et al. (TR 33, 1971) produced them in casual conversation. It must be emphasized that these conversations were not on academic matters, and did not necessarily require the kind of vocabulary being tested by the Instructional Concepts Inventory. All that can be said is that if children use a word in free conversation with their peers, they presumably understand that word. Word frequencies are cited in the list of occurring words both for the three kindergarten children studied by Legum et al., and for all twelve children studied including three children from first grade, three from second grade, and three from third grade. Of the 33 key words required to successfully respond to all the questions on the Instructional Concepts Inventory 16 were produced by the twelve children and 17 were not.

INSTRUCTIONAL CONCEPTS PROGRAM INVENTORY
WORDS PRODUCED BY THE 12 CHILDREN

Word	Frequency in Kindergarten	Frequency in K-3
different	1	3
eight	4	14
end	1	1
five	8	29
green	1	1
line	4	4
no	33	90
number	1	21
orange	1	1
same	1	13
smaller	0	2
square	1	1
three	10	28
under	2	4
white	1	5
yellow	0	2

INSTRUCTIONAL CONCEPTS PROGRAM INVENTORY
WORDS NOT PRODUCED BY THE 12 CHILDREN

beginning	equal	shape
beside	front	shorter
circle	largest	size
color	most	tallest
curved	purple	thinner
	rectangle	triangle

On the basis of the facts presented above, Black English does not provide dialect features which interfere with performance in the Instructional Concepts Program.